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PROGRAM All Things Considered

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SUBJECT Director Casey/El Salvador

SUSAN STAMBERG: CIA Director William Casey said today that Americans have been brainwashed by the Soviets and their Third World allies about events in Central America and disarmament in Europe. In an address to business executives here in Washington, Casey called on the private sector to help set the record straight.

NPR's Alan Berlow reports.

ALAN BERLOW: Casey pointed specifically to leftist gains in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. He said part of the blame for the success of the Soviets and their allies has been the failure of the U.S. to counter Communist propaganda, propaganda the CIA Director said has brainwashed large numbers of Americans.

DIRECTOR WILLIAM CASEY: These tiny little countries in Central America are able to mount a propaganda program, they're able to gather in Havana or Mexico City and lay out a program of propaganda that has a large part of the American public brainwashed into believing that what's happening down there is just innocent peasants seeking their rights; and do the same thing in Europe, where although the wea -- the Soviets have the weapons deployed and they've carried out their military buildup, they manage to put the West in the posture of being a threat to the peace.

BERLOW: Casey's last reference was to Soviet efforts designed to stop deployment of U.S. missiles in Europe. Casey said part of the problem in dealing with Soviet propaganda has been the inability of our government officials to offer an alternative view.

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CASEY: We just don't know how to talk back. We don't know how to go out and explain what's happening and explain the situation from our viewpoint. And the government is a little clumsy at that, and that's putting it quite charitably. On top of being clumsy, it doesn't have much credibility. The public is inclined to think that anything they hear from government has some hidden motive in it.

BERLOW: But if the government has allowed Americans to be brainwashed by Communists, Casey believes the primary responsibility for countering Soviet subversion and propaganda lies not with the government, but with the private sector.

CASEY: The word has to be passed through all the channels that exist, including employer communications and employee communications and stockholder communications. You have to use your judgment on it. But that's what I was referring to, that we just don't know how to contest these propaganda battlefields.

BERLOW: CIA Director William Casey.